

MYSTERY CONVOYS STIR CITY FEARS

Wagner Unable to Learn if
Nuclear Arms Are Being
Shipped by Night

Mayor Wagner has been trying unsuccessfully since February to learn whether nuclear weapons are being trucked through the city's streets at night.

His concern came to light yesterday when he made public a report from his Technical Advisory Committee on Radiation.

"Upon several recent occasions," the report said, "the Fire Department has been requested to escort truck convoys reported carrying nuclear weapons through the city at night."

The Mayor's advisers added: "There have been documented accidents in the United States which involved nuclear weapons and which could result in tragic consequences if they occurred in New York City, even if there were no nuclear explosion."

The report said repeated inquiries to the Department of Defense had been fruitless, "probably because of security reasons."

Despite this concern, the committee, headed by Prof. Harald H. Rossi of Columbia University, assured the Mayor that New York as "adequately protected from excessive or unwarranted exposure to radiation and from the risks of peacetime nuclear disaster."

The report praised Dr. Irving

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Mystery Convoys Worry City; Cargo May Be Nuclear Arms

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Hanson Blatz, director of the city Health Department's Office of Radiation Control, for coordinating the efforts of various city agencies to establish and enforce safety standards.

The Rossi committee said the reason for its report at this time was to enable Mayor Wagner to "take whatever action you consider necessary before the end of your term of office."

If the reports of weapons shipments are true, the trucks presumably travel to missile bases that ring the metropolitan area or to piers for shipment overseas.

Nuclear Blast Unlikely

The possibility that a nuclear explosion could be caused by a traffic accident is considered extremely remote; most experts say it is virtually impossible.

However, Dr. Blatz explained yesterday that such an accident could cause a chemical explosion that would scatter the nuclear charge of plutonium.

Plutonium, while not a serious radiation hazard, is extremely toxic. It can kill if inhaled, swallowed or taken into a skin break in even the smallest quantities.

Last Aug. 22, a trailer truck carrying 31,000 pounds of mildly radioactive Uranium 238 and thorium collided with a passenger car on the Macombs Bridge over the Harlem River. The Health Department immediately tested the area for

radioactivity and reported "absolutely no hazard."

Seven years ago, the Defense Department informally told Dr. Leona Baumgartner, then the city's Health Commissioner, that there was no need to transport nuclear weapons through New York City.

But when the requests for convoy escorts began coming in to the Fire Department, Mayor Wagner sent an inquiry in February to Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara. This touched off an exchange of correspondence, in which, yesterday's report said, "it has been impossible to obtain the required information."

The report said: "It is probably not important that any details be given or that the city register a protest against such shipments." However, if it is necessary to ship nuclear weapons through the city, the Mayor's office would like to meet with Pentagon officials to discuss safety measures.

Mr. Blatz said yesterday he had just received a letter from the Defense Department, notifying him that a brigadier general had been assigned to confer with city officials. The time and place of such a meeting have not been arranged, Mr. Blatz said.

On another matter, the Rossi committee urged that the city undertake its own review—Independent of the Atomic Energy Commission—of all requests for permission to set up nuclear reactors here.